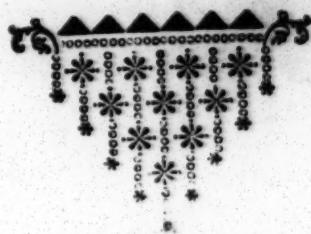


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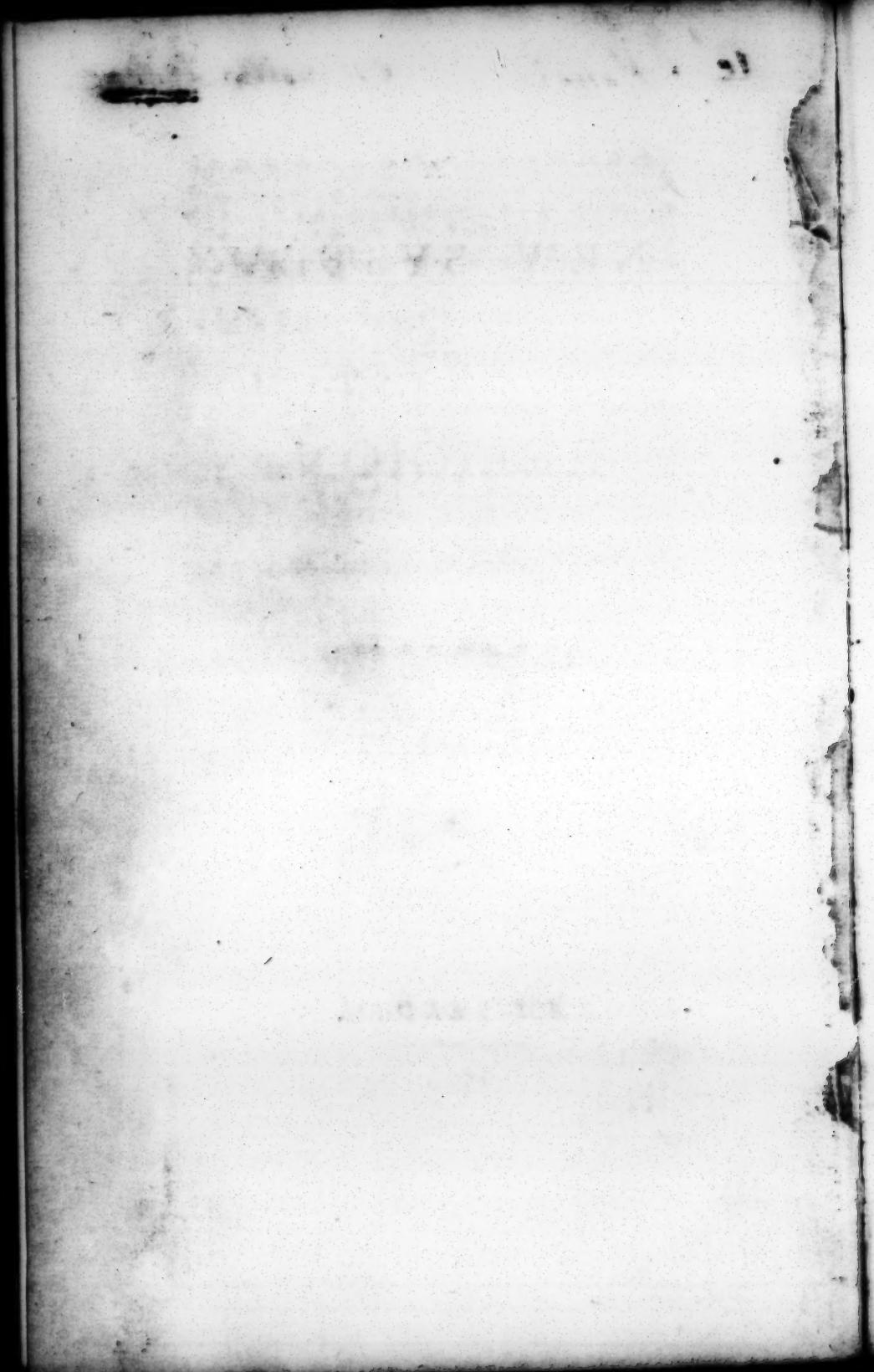
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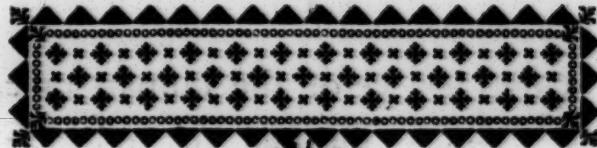
NEW SYSTEM
OF
RELIGION.



AMSTERDAM.

1790.





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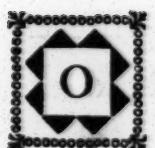
A
NEW SYSTEM
OF
RELIGION.



CHAPTER I.



THE DEITY.



MAN, when will thy pride
cease to be in exact pro-
portion to thy ignorance?

When will the heavenly light of
science teach thee humility, and
thyself?

Con-

Consider, ye of the human race, the various systems of religion, which have been recommended to your reverence by the tradition of your fathers. Does not one, and the same, radical error pervade *I. o. Christ.* them? Have not their founders taught us pride, instead of humanity? Yes, ye awful fathers of ~~the~~ ^{This is not} ~~the~~ ^{He taught us humanity.} worship! ye forgot that man ~~is~~ ^{but} a particle of littleness, and that the Deity is infinite greatness. Ye forgot what different degrees of magnitude there are, between a grain of sand and the sun: what infinite scales of being, between the Fountain of existence and man!

Hence

Hence blasphemous fanaticism has established an approximation, + a familiarity, between little man ^{Not at all unworthy} and the Creator of Gods. All the cares of the Deity, all the passions which human folly has imputed to him who is tranquillity, are concentrated in the affairs of a worm. There are no dignified beings, but the Deity and mankind; and angels, who are but the servants of man. Oh, horrible pride ! The Deity is but a superior man, in the dark conception of fanaticism ; or men are inferior deities.

Abandon this impious familiarity, abandon it for ever, and cover thy

thy head with dust, thou son of the meanest existence! Know that, as the particles of snow beneath the northern pole, as the sand in the burning desarts of Zaara, so numerous are the scales of spiritual existence, between the Deity and man: and that the lowest race of these beings knows that man is *Who and what are these beings?* but the shadow of nothing.

Sages have conceived that, as there are venomous, and apparently useless, reptiles in the lower scale of existence, so there may, in the infinite number of worlds, be some apparently noxious and useless; and whose real use is only known to the

Creator.

Creator. As a toad, or a viper, upon earth, such may this globe be in the number of worlds. Her inhabitants may have been created, and the lunar orb appointed to maintain their native frenzy, as examples of folly to superior beings, that they may, by comparison, know the value of wisdom, and be happy.

* *Such can only the wise tell.*

The intentions of the Creator we cannot know: but the pride of man we know, and the cause of that pride. Before the telescope laid open the wonders of the sky, it was ^{Nothing of} ~~the sort:~~ thought that the stars were but ^{their nature} ~~was imagined~~ ornaments to our dome, and sparks ^{4000 years} ~~ago as~~ to illumine our darkness. But by

what ^{and their} ~~Course and~~

Moreover some young men inhabiting a place called

"Kengshooed."

Wrote him.

what mental telescope shall we discover the superior scales of spiritual existence; and learn humility, by comparing ourselves with the inhabitants of eternal day? We are proud, because superior to beasts, whom we see, and know: and might be humble, could we see, and know, even the lowest link of an infinite chain of superior being.

The Atheist, and the Deist, and the worshipper of received faiths, are alike misled by pride. The Atheist erects himself into the intellectual arbiter of the universe; and thinks there is no knowledge, but what resides in his own bosom.

How

How canst thou prove the existence of a Deity, when thou canst not prove thy own? Art thou not as fanatic, absolutely to deny, as others, absolutely to believe? Do not thy sences, and thy reason, perpetually deceive thee? how then canst thou know that there is no God? True it is that the credulity of the nations is vast, and the arts of priests various: but observe well the fabric of this world, and the various scale of being which our organs admit us to perceive, and confess the probability of a Deity; nay, of many superior beings, of such power as to be gods to mankind, though as men to the Fountain

+
*
{

tain of Life. Is thy mind so narrow, as to think that human conceptions imprison the universe? Is man the only rational being, because the only one with whom we are acquainted? If thou believest that there is no God, thou art thyself credulous; and if thou wishest to persuade others, thou art but a fanatic of a new faith. Atheist, doubt of thy faith: doubt, but do not tremble. Let not the pride of man persuade thee, that thy opinions *Perhaps true.* can excite any passion, but pity, in *fit + most dangerous to attack* the minds of superior beings.— Could a man create a fly, and put it into his garden, would he not smile to find, that the fly denied the

ex-

existence of his creator? Would ^{Not at} he be angry? No. He would ^{all contem} fay ^{an out-} the eyes of a fly are but small, and ^{many & Man} how can he see a large object? ^{would} ^{Here it} ^{furth with.}

And thou, Deist, why has thy pride made thee so familiar with the Deity? Thou believest in the existence of man, and in the existence of one God; but formest no conception of the infinite distance between God and man; nor allowest that there must be infinite orders of rational being, between the meanest and the highest. The meanest of these orders must be as gods to thee; and yet thou laughest at the Polytheist.

But

— But the greatest pride belongs to the received faiths, which bring down the Deity to human littleness, and level him in our dust. Systems of blasphemy, when will ye cease to disgrace human reason ! Thou, fanatic, art humble. Know that thy humility is the extremity of pride. The purple tyrant is a stranger to the pride that swells thy heart. Thou art humble with man, but the bosom friend of thy God, who hears all thy petitions ; and has appointed and selected thee from the mass of mankind, to be his familiar companion in this life, and in eternity.—Thou art humble !

To

To human pride are all religions indebted for their progress; and a more powerful and universal principle could not be employed. Hold out the idea of a select, and chosen, society, entitled to benefits unknown to the rest of mankind, and you will be greedily heard. And what is this life to eternity? Let us, say they, be bruised, and humbled in this life; while even here we are supported with the proud idea, that we are superior to the rest of mankind, and the chosen friends of God; and that we shall enjoy eternal glory, and happiness, while our enemies, nay all mankind, not of

*Too
true.*

*This is
the fault
of all
Christianities.*

our

— our society, shall have eternal torture. How deeply are pride and malice rooted in our hearts ! This is what mortals call humility !

— Of the Deity man can form no idea : and perhaps even the first spiritual scale cannot have the smallest comprehension of his attributes, or mode of existence. Has a worm any conception of the human mind ? When we say that the Deity is self-existent, infinite, eternal, what ideas can we form of those qualities ? None. Let us adore him in silence : but never imagine that our adoration can honour the Fountain of Being.

(15)

Being. Such adoration is blasphemy. Our adoration only marks us as rational creatures; and excites grateful and benevolent ideas in the mind.

X



CHAP.



CHAPTER II.



MATTER AND CREATION.

ALL things in existence, and all modes of existence, have their opposites. Nor can the human, or perhaps any, mind form a conception of an object, without a tacit comparison between it and its opposite. What idea of light, without darkness? of truth, without falsehood? of good, if there were no evil? It may be said, that to deny *moral* existence to any object, is at same time to deny existence to its opposite :

posite: for without its contrariety nothing is known to exist.

Hence to deny the eternity of matter, is to deny the eternity of the Deity. He is the supreme opposite of matter, of chaos. As the purest of spirits he must have had his opposite, in the grossest of matter, from all eternity.

All this is looking too bright.

Had not matter been coeternal with the Deity, he must have filled all space with infinite purity; and it was impossible that any corruptible matter could be produced, in a universe completely filled with the divine radiance.

If

If we deny a coexistent subject, we must allow that the Deity is the absolute creator of evil, which seems absurd; whereas if we grant the eternity of matter, the origin of evil is accounted for, without any derogation to the Creator. For even omnipotence cannot work impossibilities: and it is as impossible to impart spiritual perfection to matter, as it is to make darkness and light the same.

No ancient system of religion, or philosophy, has ever supposed that the Deity absolutely created matter; caused matter to exist, while nothing before existed except himself.

Even

Even in the book of Genesis, the word, translated *created*, implies merely *fashioned* or *made*, as the most skilful Hebraists agree. The Bramins, the Persians, the Phœnicians, the Egyptians, the Greek philosophers, all allowed a chaos, a mass of inert matter, coexistent with the Deity.

Atheists assert of course the eternity of matter ; and their antagonists assume the opposite proposition. But the eternity of matter is indeed the strongest argument for the existence of a Deity, from that aphorism that no object exists without its opposite. This seems a law of necessity,

*morally
true.*

cessity, of fate, as an ancient Greek would express it, that even omnipotence could not alter nor controul.

But how the purest of spirits, the Deity, could act upon gross and inert matter, it is impossible to conceive. Light, which is almost a spiritual substance, acts in a kind of creative capacity upon gross matter; but that a pure spirit could have no contact, nor influence whatever, upon matter, is a grand argument of modern atheism.

The views of atheism are, however, as confined, as those of fanaticism. We must believe that there
+ are

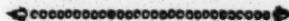
are at least as many degrees, and sorts, of spirit, as of matter. The creation of spirits by the Deity, is inconceivable by us; and perhaps even by the purest spirits themselves. But grant that the Creator only immediately formed the Gods, the spirits next to himself in power and dignity, and imparted to them a supreme portion of his own creative power, why might not they either act upon matter themselves; or by creating inferior spirits, but still of vast power, minister to a progress, that led down by degrees to the creation of matter? What a vast idea must it give us of the great First Cause to suppose even this

*Beginning
the
question
and a
silly one*

this world, and man, but the work
of one of his remote ministers ! But
can we have too vast ideas of the
Deity ? Yes, says human pride,
we may !



CHAPTER III.



THE GODS.

THE polytheism of all ancient nations was founded upon mistaken principles. Their gods were the offspring of human pride, and often but deified men; ever similar in passions, and vices, to mankind their creators, not their creation. The vastness of the universe was unknown, even to the ancient philosophers. This earth was esteemed the essence of creation, man in

the

et origines

the next degree to the gods. All religions have stood upon human pride.

The polytheism here to be established, is on the contrary founded upon the vastness of the universe, the insignificance of this earth, and of man. Even inferior spirits must be as gods to man, in power, in knowledge, in every attribute.

But by the Gods are here meant spirits of vast and superior power; capable of creating worlds, and of annihilating them, as a man builds a house, and throws it down.

That

That such high beings are, is inferable from the chain of existence, observable in the material world. Nor can any idea be more honourable to the Deity, than to suppose that the spirits of his own immediate creation are of amazing power, and perfection, and yet inferior to him in an infinite degree. Now, if we allow the existence of a Deity, the most magnificent ideas concerning him must infallibly be the most true.

It is probable that each God presides over a world of his own creation, and has ministering spirits to manage different departments. Some ancients believed that each nation

Home.
Colloq.
and.
Foreign.

and
every
man.

nation had it's guardian divinity; nor can he who believes a first cause of order, think that even human affairs, little as they are, can be entirely left to human management.

*Note by the Staff
- on record
so &c.* If even monarchs be approached with awe, and a sort of adoration, there can surely be no offence in the worship of the Gods, our creators and protectors. Humility, and propriety concur to dictate that our adoration of them cannot be offensive to the Deity, whom we most highly honour in honouring his immediate ministers.

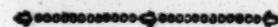
Nor

Nor let the trite argument against polytheism be here applied, namely that there cannot be but one being omnipotent, and omnipresent. This is true of the Deity, the great first cause. But man is little ; and many are the beings who are gods to him. *E. 2*
 Nor can the power, or will, of these beings clash. They are created pure intelligences, for good, and not for evil ; and feel immediately the constant presence of the omnipotent, and omnipresent, Deity.





CHAPTER IV.



THE GENII.

THE spiritual orders of being are unknown to us; and of consequence we have no distinct terms, even for the grand divisions of these orders.

A thousand names could not express even these grand divisions of spirits, distinct in power, and in qualities.

The highest order is that of the Gods. The lowest that of the Genii, or daemons.

Ancient

Ancient philosophers, who asserted that every human being has his guardian Genius, might with less absurdity have asserted that every ape has his guardian man. Philosophy is often but the quintessence of human pride.

The Gods cannot be evil, because supreme intelligence, and supreme goodness, are the same; and wickedness and folly are sisters. But of the dæmons, whose mind exceeds that of man by only one degree, it is not improbable that some may be bad. Their forms may even partake of matter, and yet be what men may call spiritual. There may be

*Some have
so asserted.
Elbertus.*

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111

2.35.

(30)

be degrees of matter so fine as to escape our organs. The air almost escapes them.

The offices, and enjoyments, of these spirits, we are strangers to; but it is highly probable that they often intermix in human affairs, and produce those singular events, which are by some imputed to fortune, and by others to a special providence.



CHAP.

CHAPTER V.

ORIGIN OF EVIL.

IF, say the Atheists, you take away any of the attributes of the Deity, you destroy his existence, for a Deity without benevolence, or without power, is no Deity. Granted. But evil must have got into the universe, either with the permission of the Deity, in which case he is not all-good, or in other words, you destroy his existence: or else against his permission, in which case he is not

not omnipotent, and you also destroy his existence: this dilemma seems the chief basis of atheism.

But the origin of evil may be accounted for in two ways; neither of which derogates from the belief of a Deity.

The eternity of matter the Atheists will grant; and, without this being allowed, it seems impossible to account for the origin of evil.

Though the Deity have infinite benevolence, and infinite power to exert that benevolence, yet he cannot operate absolute impossibilities.

He

He cannot make a body be in one place, and in another, at the same instant ; nor can he render opposite objects identically the same. He cannot make light darkness, nor truth falsehood. Neither can he make matter perfect, and free from evil ; which is in it's essence imperfect, and full of evil.

In another point of view, if pride would permit us to suppose it possible that this our world, and man, are but the works of inferior agents of the Deity, whose infinite purity could not act upon matter, the origin of evil may be partly owing to these agents being neither all-good nor

nor all-powerful. And yet no imputation rests upon the Deity, any more than when we allow that the Deity made man, and yet see how imperfect the works of man are. That the Deity can act upon matter may be an impossibility ; but it is a certain impossibility that he can impart infinite benevolence, or infinite power, to any other being.

*As to a
Christianity, coeternal with the good, is inad-
missible. An evil deity is a con-
tradiction in terms. Evil seems a
mere defect, or absence of good ;
as darkness is the absence of light.
Now a defect can never be an active
principle.*

principle. Moral evil is the fruit of imperfect understanding; but infinite intelligence is essential to the idea of a deity.

Nor can a spirit of any superior order ever mistake evil for it's good, or in other words, be evil. The purity of it's essence must act, as a quick instinct, against evil; and the vastness of it's intelligence must guard even against it's distant approach. It is denied that evil at all exists, except in matter and material beings.

Even in human society good must exceed evil, else that society could not

2. 29.
33.

not exist. In all countries, and ages, a bad man is an exception to society, and not a rule. An action must have great goodness to excite praise ; and small wickedness will incur dispraise. When a man does well, he is not praised, because he barely does what is expected ; but if ill, he is blamed. The natural state of man must be good : but man in a state of perfection is a contradiction in terms, irreconcileable even by human pride.



CHAPTER VI.

M A N.

WH Y am I here? says the Atheist. Thou art here, as part of a large plan, which thou canst never conceive, nor perhaps minds of a thousand times thy powers.

Man forms the medium between material and spiritual existence. His component parts are perhaps the most dissonant; and his character of course the most eccentric of all beings.

Some

Some fix upon one predominant character for mankind ; others upon others. Some will have all men influenced only by self-interest ; others by vanity. But every one needs but consult his own breast, + to find that he is influenced by a variety of motives.

All mankind have indeed a leading character, namely incongruity.
Still more.

The greatest minds often act, and speak, meanly ; the wisest, foolishly.

Nay, the most opposite qualities are often found in the same man ; the greatest folly in some respects, joined

joined with the greatest wisdom in others : and the like.

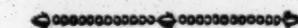
Man is in some matters a spirit, in others a beast. If any rational being have occasion for the utmost humility, it is man : and yet he is certainly of all rational beings the most proud. The reason is, that he is of all these beings the most ignorant.

!!!
*ignorance
the others.*





CHAPTER VII.



HIS DUTIES.

THE great duty of man is to be useful, and beneficial to others. A noxious plant produces poison; a beneficial one fruits. Such is man.

The duty which we owe to the Gods is a remote, and feeble, incentive to conduct. Our more immediate motive is the good opinion of others; and a regard to the order of society.

Human

(41)

Human nature has been represented as in a state of the utmost depravity ; but it's depravity has never been such, and never will be such, that good actions will pass for bad, and bad for good. Virtue lives.

Our regard for the opinion of others therefore does honour to human nature, and to it's Creator.

But, independently of the opinion of others, a man ought to do what, from the nature and essence of morality, he knows to be just and right.

Man

G

Man has certainly a moral instinct, which gives him satisfaction, when he does what is right; and checks him when he acts amiss. This moral instinct is what is commonly called conscience.

Moral instinct is as necessary to human existence, as natural instinct is to that of beasts.

— This moral instinct is an actual emanation of the Deity, enlightening all rational minds; as the emanation of solar light illuminates natural objects. The clouds
of

of vice may obstruct, but cannot extinguish, it.

Even brutal instinct is an emanation of the Deity; but as the recipient of light is, such is the colour and nature of that light. A vegetable only grows by the solar heat: an insect grows, and moves. The intellectual light of the Deity is alike varied, in various recipients.

Perhaps the most approximate motive to human action is, the ease and delight we feel in doing good, and our pain in doing evil.

CHAPTER VIII.

HIS HAPPINESS.

PLEASURE cannot be happiness,
because constant pleasure ceases to
be such.

Pleasures demand intervals; and
the highest of them are momentary.
Happiness must be constant; must
exist in the intervals of pleasure.

*To answer
to me well
it is.*
Mere ease, or indolence, is not
happiness, any more than sleep is
happiness.

Happiness

Happiness consists in the active pursuit of some great object; and in intervals of pleasure and of ease.

The improvement of the mind is the most important of human pursuits; and the gradual acquisition of virtue and of knowledge, leads to the greatest happiness.

If the moral instinct be much clouded, and the love of virtue and useful knowledge obliterated, the man may have many pleasures, but never can have happiness.

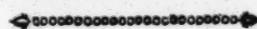
If human existence terminate not with this life, it is of the last importance

portance to preserve the moral instinct clear; for in proportion to the clearness of that instinct, must our future happiness be.

That vice and misery are the same, is not a metaphor, but a simple truth. Every act of vice soils the mental mirror of happiness.



CHAPTER IX.



A FUTURE LIFE.

MAN has no authentic title to *Independent*
a future life. Think not, vain *designs*
mortals, that if ye died as the
beasts, the justice of the Deity
could be arraigned. Impious
thought!

Let the good be often miserable, and the bad often happy in this life, what is it to the justice of the Deity? Can he work impossibilities,

abilities, or overcome the imperfection of matter?

Man is so important in his own eyes ! But if he does right, what merit has he to entitle him to eternal happiness ?

Our horror at annihilation, and our strong hopes of immortality, have been adduced as arguments for our immortality. Wise arguments ! Are our fears, and wishes, rules for our Creator ?

Could apes flatter themselves that they should at their death become men, would we regard their vain

(49)

vain imaginations, as the rules of nature?

If the soul be immortal, it is the effect of the goodness of the Creator, and not of his justice.

It is impossible to prove the immortality of the soul; and impossible to prove its mortality. But probability is in favour of the first position. For man is the being who connects the material and spiritual chain. As such he must have something spiritual in him; and what is spiritual cannot die.

The

(50)

The happiness, or misery of a future life must consist in the state of the mind. Vice must minister its own torments; virtue its own happiness.

*Concord.
Aug 33.*

E N D.

